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54 H Ewing

62

Jackanapes

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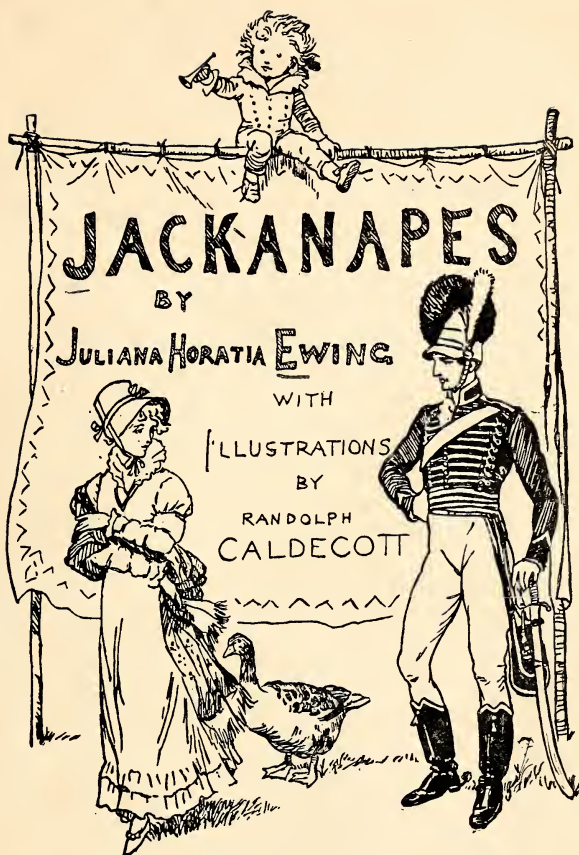
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Frontispiece—Jackanapes.

“ ‘JACKANAPES, IT WON’T DO, YOU AND LOLLO MUST GO ON.’ ”

See page 62.



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
J. H. WILLARD

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY
P H I L A D E L P H I A

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

—
THE STORY OF A SHORT LIFE
—

50 Cents

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J
Ewing
cop. 2

INTRODUCTION

“IF there is a soul so dead that it does not know ‘Jackanapes’, let it stop all other reading until that is read. I do not know a better short story.” So says one who knows what is good for young people to read; and the dictum is borne out by the unquestioned popularity of the sturdy, honorable hero of the story.

“Jackanapes” made Mrs. Ewing’s name deservedly famous, for it not only contains her highest teaching, but is her best piece of literary work. It was not, however, her first “soldier story,” for in “The Peace Egg”—now incorporated into this volume, she first began to sing those praises of military life and courtesies which she afterward more fully set forth in “Jackanapes” and “The Story of a Short Life.”

INTRODUCTION

The secret of the popularity of Mrs. Ewing's stories probably lies in her constructive ability. She always had a clear idea of what she was to write. With regard to the introduction of passion into stories, she held that "It was most necessary, but that human feelings are elastic and soon overstrained, and that this kind of ammunition should be sparingly fired, with intervals of refreshment." One of the most important doctrines she held, and in an extraordinary manner carried out, was, that if a writer could express himself in one word he was not to use two."

In the story of "Jackanapes," the captain's child, with his clear blue eyes and mop of yellow curls, is the one important figure. True, there are the doting aunt, the weak-kneed, but faithful Tony, the irascible general, the punctilious postman, the loyal boy-trumpeter, the silent major, and the ever-dear Lollo, but all these life-like figures group around the hero in subordinate positions. In all they say and do and feel they conspire to reflect the glory and beauty of the noble, generous, tender-spirited hero, "Jackanapes."

J. H. W.

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CHAPTER I

TWO Donkeys and the Geese lived on the Green, and all other residents of any social standing lived in houses round it. The houses had no names. Everybody's address was, "The Green," but the Postman and the people of the place knew where each family lived. As to the rest of the world, what has one to do with the rest of the world, when he is safe at home on his own Goose Green? Moreover, if a stranger did come on any lawful business, he might ask his way at the shop.

Most of the inhabitants were long-lived, early deaths (like that of the little Miss Jessamine) being exceptional; and most of the old people were proud of their age, especially the sexton, who

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would be ninety-nine come Martinmas, and whose father remembered a man who had carried arrows, as a boy, for the battle of Flodden Field. The Gray Goose and the big Miss Jessamine were the only elderly persons who kept their ages secret. Indeed, Miss Jessamine never mentioned any one's age, or recalled the exact year in which anything had happened. She said that she had been taught that it was bad manners to do so "in a mixed assembly."

The Gray Goose also avoided dates, but this was partly because her brain, though intelligent, was not mathematical, and computation was beyond her. She never got farther than "last Michaelmas," "the Michaelmas before that," and "the Michaelmas before the Michaelmas before that." After this her head, which was small, became confused, and she said "Ga, ga!" and changed the subject.

But she remembered the little Miss Jessamine, the Miss Jessamine with the "conspicuous" hair. Her aunt, the big Miss Jessamine, said it was her only fault. The hair was clean, was abundant, was glossy, but do what you would with it, it

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never looked quite like other people's. And at church, after Saturday night's wash, it shone like the best brass fender after a spring cleaning. In short, it was conspicuous, which does not become a young woman—especially in church.

Those were worrying times altogether, and the Green was used for strange purposes. A political meeting was held on it, with the village Cobbler in the chair, and a speaker who came by stage coach from the town, where they had wrecked the bakers' shops and discussed the price of bread. He came a second time, by stage, but the people had heard something about him in the meanwhile, and they did not keep him on the Green. They took him to the pond and tried to make him swim, which he could not do, and the whole affair was very disturbing to all quiet and peaceable fowls. After which another man came and preached sermons on the Green, and a great many people went to hear him; for those were "trying times," and folk ran hither and thither for comfort. And then what did they do but drill the ploughboys on the Green, to get them ready to fight the French, and teach them the

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goose-step! However, that came to an end at last, for Bony was sent to St. Helena, and the ploughboys were sent back to the plough.

Everybody lived in fear of Bony in those days, especially the naughty children, who were kept in order during the day by threats of, "Bony shall have you," and who had nightmares about him in the dark. They thought he was an Ogre in a cocked hat. The Gray Goose thought he was a Fox, and that all the men of England were going out in red coats to hunt him. It was no use to argue the point, for she had a very small head, and when one idea got into it there was no room for another.

Besides, the Gray Goose never saw Bony, nor did the children, which rather spoiled the terror of him, so that the Black Captain became more effective as a Bogy with hardened offenders. The Gray Goose remembered his coming to the place perfectly. What he came for she did not pretend to know. It was all part and parcel of the war and bad times. He was called the Black Captain, partly because of himself and partly because of his wonderful black mare. Strange

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stories were afloat of how far and how fast that mare could go, when her master's hand was on her mane and he whispered in her ear. Indeed, some people thought we might reckon ourselves



“ AND TEACH THEM THE GOOSE-STEP.”

very lucky if we were not out of the frying-pan into the fire, and had not got a certain well-known Gentleman of the Road to protect us against the French. But that, of course, made

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him none the less useful to the Johnsons' Nurse, when the little Miss Johnsons were naughty.

“You leave off crying this minnit, Miss Jane, or I 'll give you right away to the horrid, wicked officer. Jemima! just look out o' the windy, if you please, and see if the Black Cap'n's a-coming with his horse to carry away Miss Jane.”

And there, sure enough, the Black Captain strode by, with his sword clattering as if it did not know whose head to cut off first. But he did not call for Miss Jane that time. He went on to the Green, where he came so suddenly upon the eldest Master Johnson, sitting in a puddle on purpose, in his new nankeen skeleton suit, that the young gentleman thought judgment had overtaken him at last, and abandoned himself to the howlings of despair. His howls were redoubled when he was clutched from behind and swung over the Black Captain's shoulder, but in five minutes his tears were stanch'd, and he was playing with the officer's accoutrements. All of which the Gray Goose saw with her own eyes, and heard afterwards that that bad boy had been whining to go back to the Black Captain ever since, which

showed how hardened he was, and that nobody but Bonaparte himself could be expected to do him any good.

But those were "trying times." It was bad enough when the pickle of a large and respectable family cried for the Black Captain; when it came to the little Miss Jessamine crying for him, one felt that the sooner the French landed and had done with it the better.

The big Miss Jessamine's objection to him was that he was a soldier, and this prejudice was shared by all the Green. "A soldier," as the speaker from the town had observed, "is a blood-thirsty, unsettled sort of a rascal; that the peaceable, home-loving, bread-winning citizen can never conscientiously look on as a brother, till he has beaten his sword into a ploughshare, and his spear into a pruninghook."

On the other hand, there was some truth in what the Postman (an old soldier) said in reply; that the sword has to cut a way for us out of many a scrape into which our bread-winners get us when they drive their ploughshares into fallows that don't belong to them. Indeed, whilst

our most peaceful citizens were prosperous chiefly by means of cotton, of sugar, and of the rise and fall of the money market (not to speak of such salable matters as opium, firearms, and "black ivory"), disturbances were apt to arise in India, Africa, and other outlandish parts, where the fathers of our domestic race were making fortunes for their families. And, for that matter, even on the Green, we did not wish the military to leave us in the lurch, so long as there was any fear that the French were coming.

To let the Black Captain have little Miss Jessamine, however, was another matter. Her aunt would not hear of it; and then, to crown all, it appeared that the Captain's father did not think the young lady good enough for his son. Never was any affair more clearly brought to a conclusion.

But those were "trying times;" and one moonlight night, when the Gray Goose was sound asleep upon one leg, the Green was rudely shaken under her by the thud of a horse's feet. "Ga, ga!" said she, putting down the other leg, and running away.

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By the time she returned to her place not a thing was to be seen or heard. The horse had passed like a shot. But next day there was hurrying and skurrying and cackling at a very early hour, all about the white house with the black beams, where Miss Jessamine lived. And when the sun was so low and the shadows so long on the grass that the Gray Goose felt ready to run away at the sight of her own neck, little Miss Jane Johnson, and her "particular friend" Clarinda, sat under the big oak tree on the Green, and Jane pinched Clarinda's little finger till she found that she could keep a secret, and then she told her in confidence that she had heard from Nurse and Jemima that Miss Jessamine's niece had been a very naughty girl, and that that horrid, wicked officer had come for her on his black horse, and carried her right away.

"Will she never come back?" asked Clarinda.

"Oh, no!" said Jane, decidedly. "Bony never brings people back."

"Not never no more?" sobbed Clarinda, for she was weak-minded, and could not bear to think

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that Bony never, never let naughty people go home again.

Next day Jane had heard more.

“He has taken her to a Green?”

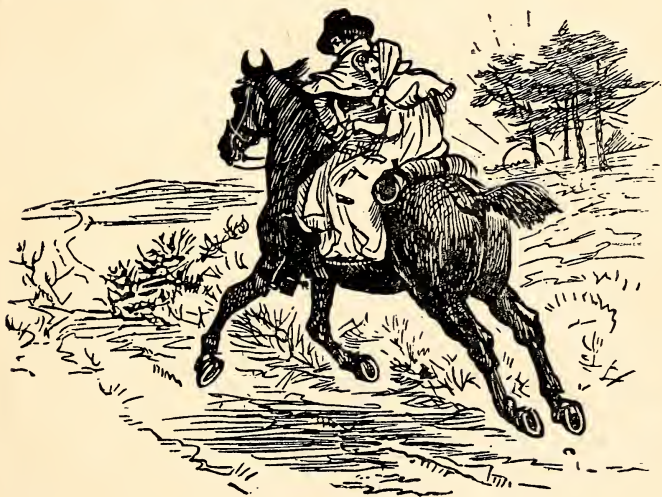
“A Goose Green?” asked Clarinda.

“No. A Gretna Green. Don’t ask so many questions, child,” said Jane; who, having no more to tell, gave herself airs.

Jane was wrong on one point. Miss Jessamine’s niece did come back, and she and her husband were forgiven. The Gray Goose remembered it well—it was Michaelmastide, the Michaelmas before the Michaelmas before the Michaelmas—but ga, ga! What does the date matter? It was autumn, harvest-time, and everybody was so busy prophesying and praying about the crops, that the young couple wandered through the lanes, and got blackberries for Miss Jessamine’s celebrated crab and blackberry jam, and made guys of themselves with bryony wreaths, and not a soul troubled his head about them, except the children and the Postman. The children dogged the Black Captain’s footsteps (his bubble reputation as an Ogre having

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burst), clamoring for a ride on the black mare. And the Postman would go somewhat out of his postal way to catch the Captain's dark eye, and show that he had not forgotten how to salute an officer.



“HE HAS TAKEN HER TO A GREEN.”

But they were “trying times.” One afternoon the black mare was stepping gently up and down the grass, with her head at her master's shoulder, and as many children crowded on her silky back

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as if she had been an elephant in a menagerie; and the next afternoon she carried him away, sword and *sabre-tache* clattering war-music at her side, and the old Postman waiting for them, rigid with salutation, at the four crossroads.

War and bad times! It was a hard winter, and the big Miss Jessamine and the little Miss Jessamine (but she was Mrs. Black-Captain now) lived very economically that they might help their poorer neighbors. They neither entertained nor went into company, but the young lady always went up the village as far as the "George and Dragon," for air and exercise, when the London Mail came in.

One day (it was a day in the following June) it came in earlier than usual, and the young lady was not there to meet it.

But a crowd soon gathered round the "George and Dragon," gaping to see the Mail Coach dressed with flowers and oak-leaves, and the guard wearing a laurel wreath over and above his royal livery. The ribbons that decked the horses were stained and flecked with the warmth and foam of the pace at which they had come,

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for they had pressed on with the news of Victory.



“UNDER THE OAK TREE ON THE GREEN.”

Miss Jessamine was sitting with her niece under the oak tree on the Green, when the Post-

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man put a newspaper silently into her hand. Her niece turned quickly—

“Is there news?”

“Don’t agitate yourself, my dear,” said her aunt. “I will read it aloud, and then we can enjoy it together; a far more comfortable method, my love, than when you go up the village, and come home out of breath, having snatched half the news as you run.”

“I am all attention, dear aunt,” said the little lady, clasping her hands tightly on her lap.

Then Miss Jessamine read aloud—she was proud of her reading—and the old soldier stood at attention behind her, with such a blending of pride and pity on his face as it was strange to see:—

“DOWNING STREET,
June 22, 1815, 1 A. M.”

“That’s one in the morning,” gasped the Postman; “beg your pardon, mum.”

But though he apologized, he could not refrain from echoing here and there a weighty word. “Glorious victory,”—“Two hundred pieces of

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artillery,"—"Immense quantity of ammunition," and so forth.

"The loss of the British Army upon this occasion has unfortunately been most severe. It had not been possible to make out a return of the killed and wounded when Major Perry left headquarters. The names of the officers killed and wounded, as far as they can be collected, are annexed.

"I have the honor ——"

"The list, aunt! Read the list!"

"My love—my darling—let us go in and—"

"No. Now! now!"

To one thing the supremely afflicted are entitled in their sorrow—to be obeyed—and yet it is the last kindness that people commonly will do them. But Miss Jessamine did. Steadying her voice, as best she might, she read on, and the old soldier stood bareheaded to hear that first Roll of the Dead at Waterloo, which began with the Duke of Brunswick and ended with Ensign Brown. Five-and-thirty British Captains fell asleep that day on the Bed of Honor, and the Black Captain slept among them.

* * * * *

There are killed and wounded by war, of whom no returns reach Downing Street.

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Three days later, the Captain's wife had joined him, and Miss Jessamine was kneeling by the cradle of their orphan son, a purple-red morsel of humanity, with conspicuously golden hair.

“Will he live, Doctor?”

“Live? God bless my soul, ma'am! Look at him! The young Jackanapes!”

CHAPTER II

THE Gray Goose remembered quite well the year that Jackanapes began to walk, for it was the year that the speckled hen for the first time in all her motherly life got out of patience when she was sitting. She had been rather proud of the eggs—they were unusually large—but she never felt quite comfortable on them; and whether it was because she used to get cramp, and go off the nest, or because the season was bad, or what, she never could tell, but every egg was addled but one, and the one that did hatch gave her more trouble than any chick she had ever reared.

It was a fine, downy, bright yellow little thing, but it had a monstrous big nose and feet, and such an ungainly walk as she knew no other instance of in her well-bred and high-stepping family. And as to behavior, it was not that it

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was either quarrelsome or moping, but simply unlike the rest. When the other chicks hopped and cheeped on the Green about their mother's feet, this solitary yellow brat went waddling off on its own responsibility, and do or cluck what the speckled hen would, it went to play in the pond.

It was off one day as usual, and the hen was fussing and fuming after it, when the Postman, going to deliver a letter at Miss Jessamine's door, was nearly knocked over by the good lady herself, who, bursting out of the house with her cap just off and her bonnet just not on, fell into his arms, crying:—

“Baby! Baby! Jackanapes! Jackanapes!”

If the Postman loved anything on earth, he loved the Captain's yellow-haired child, so propping Miss Jessamine against her own doorpost, he followed the direction of her trembling fingers and made for the Green.

Jackanapes had had the start of the Postman by nearly ten minutes. The world—the round, green world with an oak tree on it—was just becoming very interesting to him. He had tried,

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vigorously but ineffectually, to mount a passing pig the last time he was taken out walking; but then he was encumbered with a nurse. Now he



“NOW HE WAS HIS OWN MASTER.”

was his own master, and might, by courage and energy, become the master of that delightful, downy, dumpy, yellow thing, that was bobbing

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along over the green grass in front of him. Forward! Charge! He aimed well, and grabbed it, but only to feel the delicious downiness and dumpiness slipping through his fingers as he fell upon his face. "Quawk!" said the yellow thing, and wobbled off sideways. It was this oblique movement that enabled Jackanapes to come up with it, for it was bound for the Pond, and therefore obliged to come back into line. He failed again from top-heaviness, and his prey escaped sideways as before, and, as before, lost ground in getting back to the direct road to the Pond.

And at the Pond the Postman found them both, one yellow thing rocking safely on the ripples that lie beyond duck-weed, and the other washing his draggled frock with tears, because he, too, had tried to sit upon the Pond, and it wouldn't hold him.

CHAPTER III

YOUNG Mrs. Johnson, who was a mother of many, hardly knew which to pity more—Miss Jessamine, for having her little ways and her antimacassars rumpled by a young Jackanapes, or the boy himself, for being brought up by an old maid.

Oddly enough, she would probably have pitied neither, had Jackanapes been a girl. (One is so apt to think that what works smoothest works to the highest ends, having no patience for the results of friction.) That Father in God, who bade the young men to be pure, and the maidens brave, greatly disturbed a member of his congregation, who thought that the great preacher had made a slip of the tongue.

“That the girls should have purity, and the boys courage, is what you would say, good Father?” .

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“Nature has done that,” was the reply; “I meant what I said.”

In good sooth, a young maid is all the better for learning some robust virtues than maidenliness and not to move the antimacassars. And the robust virtues require some fresh air and freedom. As, on the other hand, Jackanapes (who had a boy's full share of the little beast and the young monkey in his natural composition) was none the worse, at his tender years, for learning some maidenliness—so far as maidenliness means decency, pity, unselfishness, and pretty behavior.

And it is due to him to say that he was an obedient boy, and a boy whose word could be depended on, long before his grandfather, the General, came to live at the Green.

He was obedient; that is, he did what his great-aunt told him. But—oh, dear! oh, dear!—the pranks he played, which it had never entered into her head to forbid!

It was when he had just been put into skeletons (frocks never suited him) that he became very friendly with Master Tony Johnson, a

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younger brother of the young gentleman who sat in the puddle on purpose. Tony was not enterprising, and Jackanapes led him by the nose. One summer's evening they were out late, and Miss Jessamine was becoming anxious, when



“VERY FRIENDLY WITH TONY JOHNSON.”

Jackanapes presented himself with a ghastly face all besmirched with tears. He was unusually subdued.

“I’m afraid,” he sobbed; “if you please, I’m very much afraid that Tony Johnson’s dying in the churchyard.”

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Miss Jessamine was just beginning to be distracted, when she smelled Jackanapes.

“You naughty, naughty boys! Do you mean to tell me you ’ve been smoking?”

“Not pipes,” urged Jackanapes; “upon my honor, Auntie, not pipes. Only cigars, like Mr. Johnson’s! and only made of brown paper with a very, very little tobacco from the shop inside them.”

Whereupon, Miss Jessamine sent a servant to the churchyard, who found Tony Johnson lying on a tombstone, very sick, and having ceased to entertain any hopes of his own recovery.

If it could be possible that any “unpleasantness” could arise between two such amiable neighbors as Miss Jessamine and Mrs. Johnson—and if the still more incredible paradox can be that ladies may differ over a point on which they are agreed—that point was the admitted fact that Tony Johnson was “delicate,” and the difference lay chiefly in this: Mrs. Johnson said that Tony was delicate—meaning that he was more finely strung, more sensitive, a properer subject

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for pampering and petting than Jackanapes, and that, consequently, Jackanapes was to blame for leading Tony into scrapes which resulted in his being chilled, frightened, or (most frequently) sick. But when Miss Jessamine said that Tony Johnson was delicate, she meant that he was more puling, less manly, and less healthily brought up than Jackanapes, who, when they got into mischief together, was certainly not to blame because his friend could not get wet, sit a kicking donkey, ride in the giddy-go-round, bear the noise of a cracker, or smoke brown paper with impunity, as he could.

Not that there was ever the slightest quarrel between the ladies. It never even came near it, except the day after Tony had been so very sick with riding Bucephalus in the giddy-go-round. Mrs. Johnson had explained to Miss Jessamine that the reason Tony was so easily upset was the unusual sensitiveness (as a doctor had explained it to her) of the nervous centres in her family—"Fiddlestick!" So Mrs. Johnson understood Miss Jessamine to say, but it appeared that she only said "Treaclestick!" which

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is quite another thing, and of which Tony was undoubtedly fond.

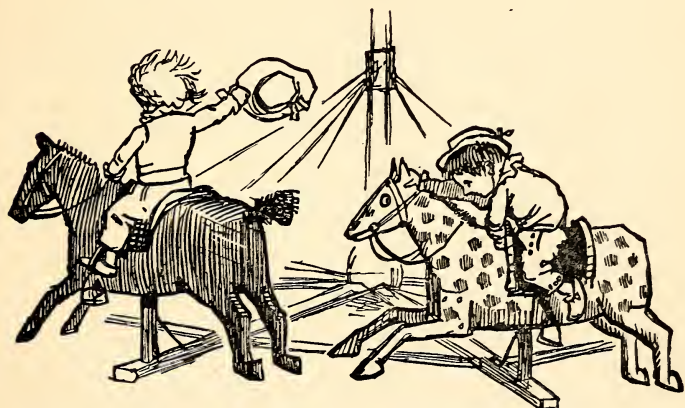
It was at the Fair that Tony was made ill by riding on Bucephalus. Once a year the Goose Green became the scene of a carnival. First of all, carts and caravans were rumbling up all along, day and night. Jackanapes could hear them as he lay in bed, and could hardly sleep for speculating what booths and whirligigs he should find fairly established, when he and his dog Spitfire went out after breakfast. As a matter of fact, he seldom had to wait so long for news of the Fair. The Postman knew the window out of which Jackanapes's yellow head would come, and was ready with his report.

"Royal Theayter, Master Jackanapes, in the old place, but be careful o' them seats, sir; they 're rickettier than ever. Two sweets and a ginger-beer under the oak tree, and the Flying Boats is just a-coming along the road."

No doubt it was partly because he had already suffered severely in the Flying Boats, that Tony collapsed so quickly in the giddy-go-round. He only mounted Bucephalus (who was spotted and

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had no tail) because Jackanapes urged him, and held out the ingenious hope that the round-and-round feeling would very likely cure the up-and-down sensation. It did not, however, and Tony tumbled off during the first revolution.



“DURING THE FIRST ROUND HE WAVED HIS HAT.”

Jackanapes was not absolutely free from qualms, but having once mounted the Black Prince he stuck to him as a horseman should. During the first round he waved his hat, and observed with some concern that the Black Prince had lost an ear since last Fair; at the

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second, he looked a little pale, but sat upright, though somewhat unnecessarily rigid; at the third round he shut his eyes. During the fourth his hat fell off, and he clasped his horse's neck. By the fifth he had laid his yellow head against the Black Prince's mane, and so clung anyhow till the hobby-horses stopped, when the proprietor assisted him to alight, and he sat down rather suddenly and said he had enjoyed it very much.

The Gray Goose always ran away at the first approach of the caravans, and never came back to the Green until there was nothing left of the Fair but footmarks and oyster-shells. Running away was her pet principle; the only system, she maintained, by which you can live long and easily, and lose nothing. If you run away when you see danger, you can come back when all is safe. Run quickly, return slowly, hold your head high, and gabble as loud as you can, and you 'll preserve the respect of the Goose Green to a peaceful old age. Why should you struggle and get hurt, if you can lower your head and swerve, and not lose a feather? Why in the

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world should anyone spoil the pleasure of life, or risk his skin, if he can help it?

“ ‘What’s the use?’
Said the Goose.’ ”

Before answering which, one might have to consider what world—which life—and whether his skin were a goose-skin; but the Gray Goose’s head would never have held all that.

Grass soon grows over footprints, and the village children took the oyster-shells to trim their gardens with; but the year after Tony rode Bucephalus there lingered another relic of Fair-time, in which Jackanapes was deeply interested. “The Green” proper was originally only part of a straggling common, which in its turn merged into some wilder waste land where gipsies sometimes squatted if the authorities would allow them, especially after the annual Fair. And it was after the Fair that Jackanapes, out rambling by himself, was knocked over by the Gipsy’s son riding the Gipsy’s red-haired pony at break-neck pace across the common.

Jackanapes got up and shook himself, none the

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worse, except for being heels over head in love with the red-haired pony. What a rate he went at! How he spurned the ground with his nimble feet! How his red coat shone in the sunshine! And what bright eyes peeped out of his dark forelock as it was blown by the wind!

The Gipsy boy had had a fright, and he was willing enough to reward Jackanapes for not having been hurt, by consenting to let him have a ride.

“Do you mean to kill the little fine gentleman, and swing us all on the gibbet, you rascal?” screamed the Gipsy-mother, who came up just as Jackanapes and the pony set off.

“He would get on,” replied her son. “It ’ll not kill him. He ’ll fall on his yellow head, and it’s as tough as a cocoanut.”

But Jackanapes did not fall. He stuck to the red-haired pony as he stuck to the hobby-horse; but oh! how different the delight of this wild gallop with flesh and blood! Just as his legs were beginning to feel as if he did not feel them, the Gipsy boy cried, “Lollo!” Round went the pony so unceremoniously, that, with as little cere-

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mony, Jackanapes clung to his neck, and he did not properly recover himself before Lollo stopped with a jerk at the place where they had started.

"Is his name Lollo?" asked Jackanapes, his hand lingering in the wiry mane.

"Yes."

"What does Lollo mean?"

"Red."

"Is Lollo your pony?"

"No. My father's." And the Gipsy boy led Lollo away.

At the first opportunity Jackanapes stole away again to the common. This time he saw the Gipsy-father, smoking a dirty pipe.

"Lollo is your pony, is n't he?" said Jackanapes.

"Yes."

"He's a very nice one."

"He's a racer."

"You don't want to sell him, do you?"

"Fifteen pounds," said the Gipsy-father; and Jackanapes sighed and went home again. That very afternoon he and Tony rode the two donkeys, and Tony managed to get thrown, and even

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Jackanapes' donkey kicked. But it was jolting, clumsy work after the elastic swiftness and the dainty mischief of the red-haired pony.

A few days later, Miss Jessamine spoke very seriously to Jackanapes. She was a good deal agitated as he told him that his grandfather, the General, was coming to the Green, and that he must be on his very best behavior during the visit. If it had been feasible to leave off calling him Jackanapes and to get used to his baptismal name of Theodore before the day after to-morrow (when the General was due), it would have been satisfactory. But Miss Jessamine feared it would be impossible in practice, and she had scruples about it on principle. It would not seem quite truthful, although she had always most fully intended that he should be called Theodore when he had outgrown the ridiculous appropriateness of his nickname. The fact was that he had not outgrown it, but he must take care to remember who was meant when his grandfather said Theodore.

Indeed, for that matter, he must take care all along.

“You are apt to be giddy, Jackanapes,” said Miss Jessamine.

“Yes, Aunt,” said Jackanapes, thinking of the hobby-horses.

“You are a good boy, Jackanapes. Thank God, I can tell your grandfather that. An obedient boy, an honorable boy, and a kind-hearted boy. But you are—in short, you *are* a Boy, Jackanapes. And I hope”—added Miss Jessamine, desperate with the results of experience—“that the General knows that Boys will be Boys.”

What mischief could be foreseen, Jackanapes promised to guard against. He was to keep his clothes and his hands clean, to look over his catechism, not to put sticky things in his pockets, to keep that hair of his smooth—(“It’s the wind that blows it, Aunty,” said Jackanapes—“I’ll send by the coach for some bear’s-grease,” said Miss Jessamine, tying a knot in her pocket-handkerchief)—not to burst in at the parlor door, not to talk at the top of his voice, not to crumple his Sunday frill, and to sit quite quiet during the sermon, to be sure to say “sir” to the General, to be careful about rubbing his shoes on the door-

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mat, and to bring his lesson-books to his aunt at once that she might iron down the dogs'-ears. The General arrived, and for the first day all went well, except that Jackanapes' hair was as wild as usual, for the hairdresser had no bear's-grease left. He began to feel more at ease with his grandfather, and disposed to talk confidentially with him, as he did with the Postman. All that the General felt it would take too long to tell, but the result was the same. He was disposed to talk confidentially with Jackanapes.

"Mons'ous pretty place this," he said, looking out of the lattice onto the Green, where the Grass was vivid with sunset, and the shadows were long and peaceful.

"You should see it in Fair-week, sir," said Jackanapes, shaking his yellow mop, and leaning back in his one of the two Chippendale arm-chairs in which they sat.

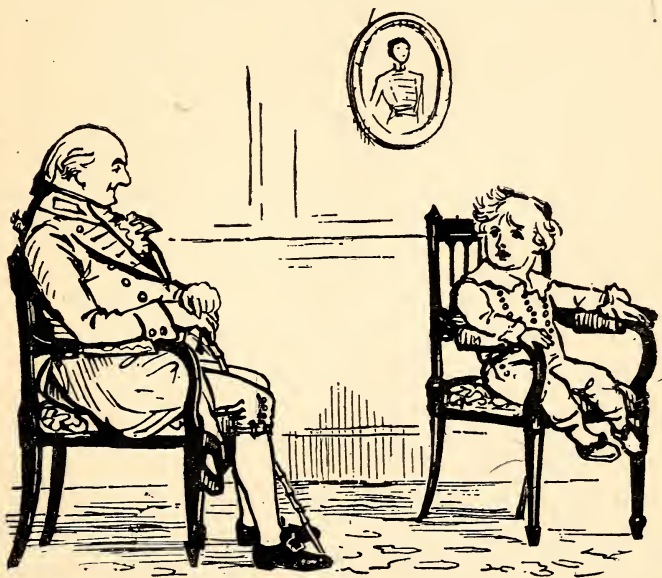
"A fine time that, eh?" said the General, with a twinkle in his left eye. (The other was glass.)

Jackanapes shook his hair one more. "I enjoyed this last one the best of all," he said. "I 'd so much money."

JACKANAPES

“By George, it ’s not a common complaint in these bad times. How much had ye?”

“I ’d two shillings. A new shilling Auntie gave me, and elevenpence I had saved up, and a penny



“‘YOU SHOULD SEE IT IN FAIR-WEEK, SIR.’”

from the Postman—*sir!*” added Jackanapes with a jerk, having forgotten it.

“And how did ye spend it—*sir?*” inquired the General.

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Jackanapes spread his ten fingers on the arms of his chair, and shut his eyes that he might count the more conscientiously.

“Watch-stand for Aunt, threepence. Trumpet for myself, twopence, that’s fivepence. Ginger-nuts for Tony, twopence, and a mug with a Grenadier on for the Postman, fourpence, that’s elevenpence. Shooting-gallery, a penny, that’s a shilling. Giddy-go-round, a penny, that’s one and a penny. Treating Tony, one and twopence. Flying Boats (Tony paid for himself), a penny, one and threepence. Shooting-gallery again, one and fourpence. Fat Woman, a penny, one and fivepence. Giddy-go-round again, one and sixpence. Shooting-gallery, one and sevenpence. Treating Tony, and then he wouldn’t shoot, so I did, one and eightpence. Living Skeleton, a penny—no, Tony treated me, the Living Skeleton doesn’t count. Skittles, a penny, one and ninepence. Mermaid (but when we got inside she was dead), a penny, one and tenpence. Theatre, a penny (Priscilla Partington, or the Green Lane Murder. A beautiful young lady, sir, with pink cheeks and a real pistol), that’s one and eleven-

pence. Ginger beer, a penny (I was so thirsty!) two shillings. And then the Shooting-gallery man gave me a turn for nothing, because, he said, I was a real gentleman, and spent my money like a man."

"So you do, sir, so you do!" cried the General. "Why, sir, you spend it like a prince. And now I suppose you 've not got a penny in your pocket?"

"Yes, I have," said Jackanapes. "Two pennies. They are saving up." And Jackanapes jingled them with his hand.

"You don't want money except at fair-times, I suppose?" said the General.

Jackanapes shook his mop.

"If I could have as much as I want, I should know what to buy," said he.

"And how much do you want, if you could get it?"

"Wait a minute, sir, till I think what twopence from fifteen pounds leaves. Two from nothing you can't, but borrow twelve. Two from twelve, ten, and carry one. Please remember ten, sir, when I ask you. One from nothing you can't,

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borrow twenty. One from twenty, nineteen, and carry one. One from fifteen, fourteen. Fourteen pounds nineteen and—what did I tell you to remember?”

“Ten,” said the General.

“Fourteen pounds nineteen shillings and tenpence, then, is what I want,” said Jackanapes.

“Bless, my soul, what for?”

“To buy Lollo with. Lollo means red, sir. The Gipsy’s red-haired pony, sir. Oh, he is beautiful! You should see his coat in the sunshine! You should see his mane! You should see his tail! Such little feet, sir, and they go like lightning! Such a dear face, too, and eyes like a mouse! But he’s a racer, and the Gipsy wants fifteen pounds for him.”

“If he’s a racer, you couldn’t ride him. Could you?”

“No—o, sir, but I can stick to him. I did the other day.”

“You did, did you? Well, I’m fond of riding, myself, and if the beast is as good as you say, he might suit me.”

“You’re too tall for Lollo, I think,” said

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Jackanapes, measuring his grandfather with his eye.

“I can double up my legs, I suppose. We’ll have a look at him to-morrow.”

“Don’t you weigh a good deal?” asked Jackanapes.

“Chiefly waistcoats,” said the General, slapping the breast of his military frock-coat. “We’ll have the little racer on the Green the first thing in the morning. Glad you mentioned it, grandson. Glad you mentioned it.”

The General was as good as his word. Next morning, the Gipsy and Lollo, Miss Jessamine, Jackanapes, and his Grandfather, and his dog, Spitfire, were all gathered at one end of the Green in a group, which so aroused the innocent curiosity of Mrs. Johnson, as she saw it from one of her upper windows, that she and the children took their early promenade rather earlier than usual. The General talked to the Gipsy, and Jackanapes fondled Lollo’s mane, and did not know whether he should be more glad or miserable if his grandfather bought him.

“Jackanapes!”

JACKANAPES

“Yes, sir!”

“I’ve bought Lollo, but I believe you were right. He hardly stands high enough for me. If you can ride him to the other end of the Green, I’ll give him to you.”

How Jackanapes tumbled on to Lollo’s back he never knew. He had just gathered up the reins when the Gipsy-father took him by the arm.

“If you want to make Lollo go fast, my little gentleman—”

“*I can make him go!*” said Jackanapes, and drawing from his pocket the trumpet he had bought in the fair, he blew a blast both loud and shrill.

Away went Lollo, and away went Jackanapes’s hat. His golden hair flew out, an aureole from which his cheeks shone red and distended with trumpeting. Away went Spitfire, mad with the rapture of the race, and the wind in his silky ears. Away went the geese, the cocks, the hens, and the whole family of Johnson. Lucy clung to her mamma, Jane saved Emily by the gathers of her gown, and Tony saved himself by a somersault.

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The Gray Goose was just returning when Jackanapes and Lollo rode back, Spitfire panting behind.

“Good, my little gentleman, good!” said the Gipsy. “You were born to the saddle. You’ve



“‘I CAN MAKE HIM GO,’ SAID JACKANAPES.”

the flat thigh, the strong knee, the wiry back, and the light, caressing hand; all you want is to learn the whisper. Come here!”

“What was that dirty fellow talking about, grandson?” asked the General.

“I can’t tell you, sir. It ’s a secret.”

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They were sitting in the window again, in the two Chippendale arm-chairs, the General devouring every line of his grandson's face, with strange spasms crossing his own.

"You must love your aunt very much, Jackanapes?"

"I do, sir," said Jackanapes, warmly.

"And whom do you love next best to your aunt?"

The ties of blood were pressing very strongly on the General himself, and perhaps he thought of Lollo. But Love is not bought in a day, even with fourteen pounds nineteen shillings and tenpence. Jackanapes answered quite readily, "The Postman."

"Why the Postman?"

"He knew my father," said Jackanapes, "and he tells me about him, and about his black mare. My father was a soldier, a brave soldier. He died at Waterloo. When I grow up I want to be a soldier, too."

"So you shall, my boy. So you shall."

"Thank you, grandfather. Auntie does n't want me to be a soldier for fear of being killed."

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“Bless my life! Would she have you get into a feather-bed and stay there? Why, you might be killed by a thunderbolt, if you were a butter-merchant!”

“So I might. I shall tell her so. What a funny fellow you are, sir! I say, do you think my father knew the Gipsy’s secret? The Postman says he used to whisper to his black mare.”

“Your father was taught to ride as a child, by one of those horsemen of the East who swoop and dart and wheel about a plain like swallows in autumn. Grandson! Love me a little, too. I can tell you more about your father than the Postman can.”

“I do love you,” said Jackanapes. “Before you came I was frightened. I ’d no notion you were so nice.”

“Love me always, boy, whatever I do or leave undone. And—God help me—whatever you do or leave undone, I ’ll love you! There shall never be a cloud between us for a day; no, sir, not for an hour. We ’re imperfect enough, all of us, we need n’t be so bitter; and life is uncertain enough at its safest, we need n’t waste its oppor-

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tunities. Look at me! Here sit I, after a dozen battles and some of the worst climates in the world, and by yonder lych gate lies your mother, who did n't move five miles, I suppose, from your aunt's apron-strings,—dead in her teens; my golden-haired daughter, whom I never saw."

Jackanapes was terribly troubled.

"Don't cry, grandfather," he pleaded, his own blue eyes round with tears. "I will love you very much, and I will try to be very good. But I should like to be a soldier."

"You shall, my boy, you shall. You 've more claims for a commission than you know of. Cavalry, I suppose, eh, ye young Jackanapes? Well, well; if you live to be an honor to your country, this old heart shall grow young again with pride for you; and if you die in the service of your country—God bless me, it can but break for ye."

And beating the region which he said was all waistcoats, as if they stifled him, the old man got up and strode out onto the Green.

CHAPTER IV

TWENTY and odd years later the Gray Goose was still alive, and in full possession of her faculties, such as they were. She lived slowly and carefully, and she lived long. So did Miss Jessamine; but the General was dead.

He had lived on the Green for many years, during which he and the Postman saluted each other with a punctiliousness that it almost drilled one to witness. He would have completely spoiled Jackanapes if Miss Jessamine's conscience would have let him; otherwise he somewhat dragooned his neighbors, and was as positive about parish matters as a ratepayer about the army. A stormy-tempered, tender-hearted soldier, irritable with the suffering of wounds of which he never spoke, whom all the village followed to his grave with tears.

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The General's death was a great shock to Miss Jessamine, and her nephew stayed with her for some little time after the funeral. Then he was obliged to join his regiment, which was ordered abroad.

One effect of the conquest which the General had gained over the affections of the village was a considerable abatement of the popular prejudice against "the military." Indeed, the village was now somewhat importantly represented in the army. There was the General himself, and the Postman, and the Black Captain's tablet in the church, and Jackanapes, and Tony Johnson, and a Trumpeter.

Tony Johnson had no more natural taste for fighting than for riding, but he was as devoted as ever to Jackanapes, and that was how it came about that Mr. Johnson bought him a commission in the same cavalry regiment that the General's grandson (whose commission had been given him by the Iron Duke) was in, and that he was quite content to be the butt of the mess where Jackanapes was the hero; and that when Jackanapes wrote home to Miss Jessamine, Tony wrote with

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the same purpose to his mother; namely, to demand her congratulations that they were on active service at last, and were ordered to the front. And he added a postscript to the effect



“HE AND THE POSTMAN SALUTED EACH OTHER.”

that she could have no idea how popular Jackanapes was, nor how splendidly he rode the wonderful red charger whom he had named after his old friend Lollo.

* * * * *

JACKANAPES

“Sound Retire!”

A Boy Trumpeter, grave with the weight of responsibilities and accoutrements beyond his years, and stained, so that his own mother would not have known him, with the sweat and dust of battle, did as he was bid; and then pushing his trumpet pettishly aside, adjusted his weary legs for the hundredth time to the horse which was a world too big for him, and muttering, “ ’Taint a pretty tune,” tried to see something of this, his first engagement, before it came to an end.

Being literally in the thick of it, he could hardly have seen less or known less of what happened in that particular skirmish if he had been at home in England. For many good reasons; including dust and smoke; and that what attention he dared distract from his commanding officer was pretty well absorbed by keeping his hard-mouthed troop-horse in hand, under pain of execration by his neighbors in the *melée*. By-and-by, when the newspapers came out, if he could get a look at one before it was thumbed to bits, he would learn that the enemy had appeared from ambush in overwhelming numbers, and that

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orders had been given to fall back, which was done slowly and in good order, the men fighting as they retired.

Born and bred on the Goose Green, the youngest



“A BOY TRUMPETER, GRAVE BEYOND HIS YEARS.”

of Mr. Johnson's gardener's numerous offspring, the boy had given his family “no peace” till they let him “go for a soldier” with Master Tony and Master Jackanapes. They consented at last, with more tears than they shed when an elder son

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was sent to jail for poaching, and the boy was perfectly happy in his life, and full of *esprit de corps*. It was this which had been wounded by having to sound retreat for "the young gentlemen's regiment," the first time he served with it before the enemy, and he was also harassed by having completely lost sight of Master Tony. There had been some hard fighting before the backward movement began, and he had caught sight of him once, but not since. On the other hand, all the pulses of his village pride had been stirred by one or two visions of Master Jackanapes whirling about on his wonderful horse. He had been easy to distinguish since an eccentric blow had bared his head without hurting it, for his close golden mop of hair gleamed in the hot sunshine as brightly as the steel of the sword flashing round it.

Of the missiles that fell pretty thickly, the Boy Trumpeter did not take much notice. First, one can't attend to everything, and his hands were full. Secondly, one gets used to anything. Thirdly, experience soon teaches one, in spite of proverbs, how very few bullets find their billet.

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Far more unnerving is the mere suspicion of fear or even of anxiety in the human mass around you. The Boy was beginning to wonder if there were any dark reason for the increasing pressure, and whether they would be allowed to move back more quickly, when the smoke in front lifted for a moment, and he could see the plain, and the enemy's line some two hundred yards away.

And across the plain between them, he saw Master Jackanapes galloping alone at the top of Lollo's speed, their faces to the enemy, his golden head at Lollo's ear.

But at this moment the noise and smoke seemed to burst out on every side, the officer shouted to him to sound retire, and between trumpeting and bumping about on his horse, he saw and heard no more of the incidents of his first battle.

Tony Johnson was always unlucky with horses, from the days of the giddy-go-round onwards. On this day—of all days in the year—his own horse was on the sick list, and he had to ride an inferior, ill-conditioned beast, and fell off that, at the very moment when it was a matter of life or death to be able to ride away. The horse fell on

JACKANAPES

him, but struggled up again, and Tony managed to keep hold of it. It was in trying to remount that he discovered, by helplessness and anguish, that one of his legs was crushed and broken, and that no feat of which he was master would get him into the saddle. Not able even to stand alone, awkwardly, agonizingly unable to mount his restive horse, his life was yet so strong within him! And on one side of him rolled the dust and smoke-cloud of his advancing foes, and on the other, that which covered his retreating friends.

He turned one piteous gaze after them, with a bitter twinge, not of reproach, but of loneliness; and then, dragging himself up by the side of his horse, he turned the other way and drew out his pistol, and waited for the end. Whether he waited seconds or minutes he never knew, before some one gripped him by the arm.

“Jackanapes! God bless you! It’s my left leg. If you could get me on—”

It was like Tony’s luck that his pistol went off at his horse’s tail, and made it plunge; but Jackanapes threw him across the saddle.

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“Hold on anyhow, and stick your spur in. I’ll lead him. Keep your head down, they’re firing high.”

And Jackanapes laid his head down—to Lollo’s ear.

It was when they were fairly off, that a sudden upspringing of the enemy in all directions had made it necessary to change the gradual retirement of our force into as rapid a retreat as possible. And when Jackanapes became aware of this, and felt the lagging and swerving of Tony’s horse, he began to wish he had thrown his friend across his own saddle, and left their lives to Lollo.

When Tony became aware of it, several things came into his head. 1. That the dangers of their ride for life were now more than doubled. 2. That if Jackanapes and Lollo were not burdened with him they would undoubtedly escape. 3. That Jackanapes’s life was infinitely valuable, and his—Tony’s—was not. 4. That this—if he could seize it—was the supremest of all the moments in which he had tried to assume the virtues which Jackanapes had by nature; and that now—

JACKANAPES

He caught at his own reins and spoke very loud—

“Jackanapes! It won’t do. You and Lollo must go on. Tell the fellows I gave you back to them, with all my heart. Jackanapes, if you love me, leave me!”

There was a daffodil light over the evening sky in front of them, and it shone strangely on Jackanapes’ hair and face. He turned with an odd look in his eyes that a vainer man than Tony Johnson might have taken for brotherly pride. Then he shook his mop, and laughed at him.

“*Leave you?* To save my skin? No, Tony, not to save my soul!”

CHAPTER V

COMING out of a hospital-tent, at headquarters, the surgeon cannoned against, and rebounded from, another officer; a sallow man, not young, with a face worn more by ungentle experiences than by age; with weary eyes that kept their own counsel, iron-gray hair, and a mustache that was as if a raven had laid its wing across his lips and sealed them.

“Well?”

“Beg pardon, Major. Did n’t see you. Oh, compound fracture and bruises, but it ’s all right. He ’ll pull through.”

“Thank God!”

It was probably an involuntary expression, for prayer and praise were not much in the Major’s line, as a jerk of the surgeon’s head would have betrayed to an observer. He was a bright little man, with his feelings showing all over him, but

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with gallantry and contempt of death enough for both sides of his profession; who took a cool head, a white handkerchief, and a case of instruments, where other men went hot-blooded with weapons, and who was the biggest gossip, male or female, of the regiment. Not even the Major's taciturnity daunted him.

"Did n't think he'd as much pluck about him as he has. He'll do all right if he does n't fret himself into a fever about poor Jackanapes."

"Whom are you talking about?" asked the Major, hoarsely.

"Young Johnson. He—"

"What about Jackanapes?"

"Don't you know? Sad business. Rode back for Johnson, and brought him in; but, monstrous ill-luck, hit as they rode. Left lung—"

"Will he recover?"

"No. Sad business. What a frame—what limbs — what health — and what good looks! Finest young fellow—"

"Where is he?"

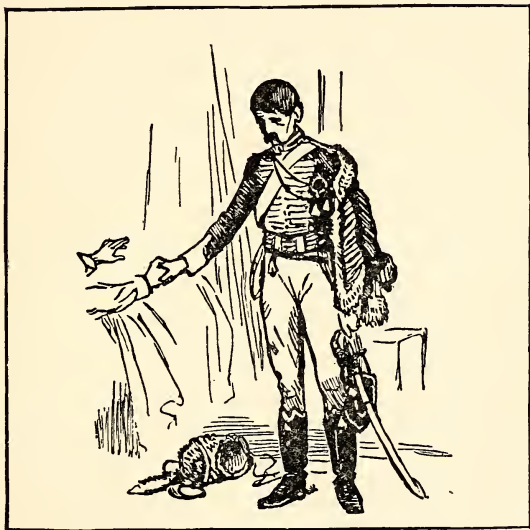
"In his own tent," said the surgeon, sadly.

JACKANAPES

The Major wheeled and left him.

* * * * *

“Can I do anything else for you?”



““CAN I DO ANYTHING ELSE FOR YOU?””

“Nothing, thank you. Except—Major! I wish I could get you to appreciate Johnson.”

“This is not an easy moment, Jackanapes.”

“Let me tell you, sir—he never will—that if he could have driven me from him, he would be

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lying yonder at this moment, and I should be safe and sound."

The Major laid his hand over his mouth, as if to keep back a wish he would have been ashamed to utter.

"I 've known old Tony from a child. He 's a fool on impulse, a good man and a gentleman in principle. And he acts on principle, which it 's not every—some water, please! Thank you, sir. It 's very hot, and yet one's feet get uncommonly cold. Oh, thank you, thank you. He's no fire-eater, but he has a trained conscience and a tender heart, and he 'll do his duty when a braver and more selfish man might fail you. But he wants encouragement; and when I'm gone--"

"He shall have encouragement. You have my word for it. Can I do nothing else?"

"Yes, Major. A favor."

"Thank you, Jackanapes."

"Be Lollo's master, and love him as well as you can. He 's used to it."

"Would n't you rather Johnson had him?"

The blue eyes twinkled in spite of mortal pain.

"Tony *rides* on principle, Major. His legs are

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bolsters, and will be to the end of the chapter. I could n't insult dear Lollo, but if you don't care—"

"Whilst I live—which shall be longer than I desire or deserve—Lollo shall want nothing, but—you. I have too little tenderness for—my dear boy, you're faint. Can you spare me for a moment?"

"No, stay—Major!"

"What? What?"

"My head drifts so—if you would n't mind."

"Yes! Yes!"

"Say a prayer by me. Out loud, please, I am getting deaf."

"My dearest Jackanapes—my dear boy—"

"One of the Church Prayers—Parade Service, you know—"

"I see. But the fact is—God forgive me, Jackanapes—I'm a very different sort of fellow to some of you youngsters. Look here, let me fetch—"

But Jackanapes's hand was in his, and it wouldn't let go.

There was a brief and bitter silence.

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“ ’Pon my soul, I can only remember the little one at the end.”

“Please,” whispered Jackanapes.

Pressed by the conviction that what little he could do it was his duty to do, the Major, kneeling, bared his head, and spoke loudly, clearly, and very reverently—

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—”

Jackanapes moved his left hand to his right one, which still held the Major’s—

“—The love of God.”

And with that—Jackanapes died.

CHAPTER VI

JACKANAPES' death was sad news for the Goose Green, a sorrow just qualified by honorable pride in his gallantry and devotion. Only the Cobbler dissented, but that was his way. He said he saw nothing in it but foolhardiness and vainglory. They might both have been killed, as easy as not, and then where would ye have been? A man's life was a man's life, and one life was as good as another. No one would catch him throwing his away. And, for that matter, Mrs. Johnson could spare a child a great deal better than Miss Jessamine.

But the parson preached Jackanapes' funeral sermon on the text, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it"; and all the village went and wept to hear him.

Nor did Miss Jessamine see her loss from the

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Cobbler's point of view. On the contrary, Mrs. Johnson said she never to her dying day should forget how, when she went to condole with her, the old lady came forward, with gentlewomanly self-control, and kissed her, and thanked God that her dear nephew's effort had been blessed with success, and that this sad war had made no gap in her friend's large and happy home circle.

"But she's a noble, unselfish woman," sobbed Mrs. Johnson, "and she taught Jackanapes to be the same, and that's how it is that my Tony has been spared to me. And it must be sheer goodness in Miss Jessamine, for what can she know of a mother's feelings? And I'm sure most people seem to think that if you 've a large family you don't know one from another any more than they do, and that a lot of children are like a lot of store-apples, if one's taken it won't be missed."

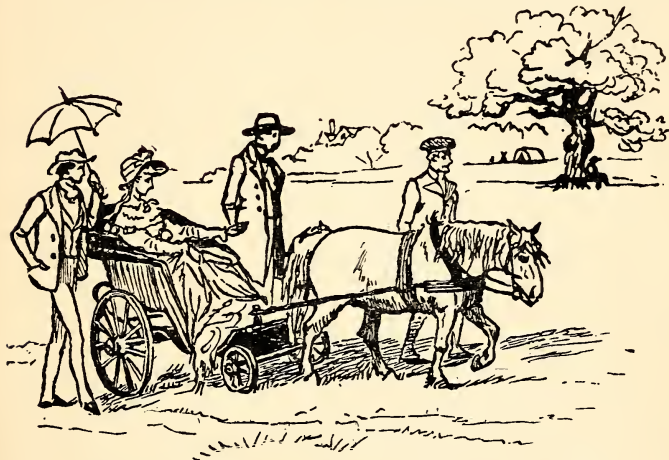
Lollo—the first Lollo, the Gipsy's Lollo—very aged, draws Miss Jessamine's bath-chair slowly up and down the Goose Green in the sunshine.

The ex-Postman walks beside him, which Lollo tolerates to the level of his shoulder. If the

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Postman advances any nearer to his head, Lollo quickens his pace, and were the Postman to persist in the injudicious attempt, there is, as Miss Jessamine says, no knowing what might happen.

In the opinion of the Goose Green, Miss Jessa-



“LOLLO DRAWS MISS JESSAMINE SLOWLY UP AND DOWN.”

mine has borne her troubles “wonderfully.” Indeed, to-day, some of the less delicate and less intimate of those who see everything from the upper windows, say (well behind her back) that “the old lady seems quite lively with her military beaux again.”

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The meaning of this is, that Captain Johnson is leaning over one side of her chair, whilst by the other bends a brother officer who is staying with him, and who has manifested an extraordinary interest in Lollo. He bends lower and lower, and Miss Jessamine calls to the Postman to request Lollo to be kind enough to stop, whilst she is fumbling for something which always hangs by her side, and has got entangled with her spectacles.

It is a twopenny trumpet, bought years ago in the village fair, and over it she and Captain Johnson tell, as best they can between them, the story of Jackanapes' ride across the Goose Green; and how he won Lollo—the Gipsy's Lollo—the racer Lollo—dear Lollo—faithful Lollo—Lollo, the never vanquished—Lollo, the tender servant of his old mistress. And Lollo's ears twitch at every mention of his name.

Their hearer does not speak, but he never moves his eyes from the trumpet, and when the tale is told, he lifts Miss Jessamine's hand and presses his heavy black mustache in silence to her trembling fingers.

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The sun, setting gently to his rest, embroiders the sombre foliage of the oak-tree with threads of gold. The Gray Goose is sensible of an atmosphere of repose, and puts up one leg for the night.



“WANDERING OFF INTO THE LANES.”

The grass glows with a more vivid green, and, in answer to a ringing call from Tony, his sisters, fluttering over the daisies in pale-hued muslins, come out of their ever-open door, like pretty pigeons from a dovecote.

JACKANAPES

And if the good gossips' eyes do not deceive them, all the Miss Johnsons and both the officers go wandering off into the lanes, where bryony wreaths still twine about the brambles.

* * * * *

A sorrowful story, and ending badly?

Nay, Jackanapes, for the end is not yet.

A life wasted that might have been useful?

Men who have died for men, in all ages, forgive the thought!

There is a heritage of heroic example and noble obligation, not reckoned in the Wealth of Nations, but essential to a nation's life; the contempt of which, in any people, may, not slowly, mean even its commercial fall.

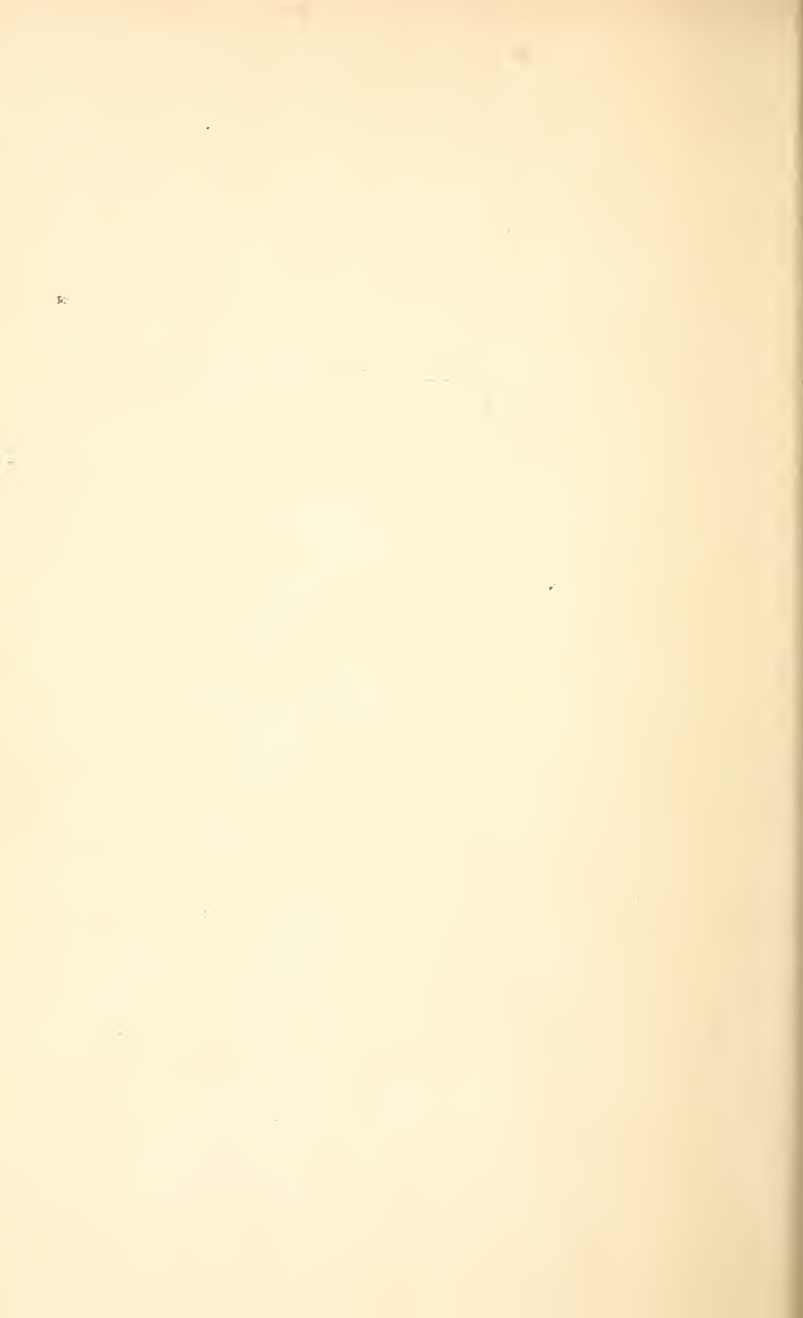
Very sweet are the uses of prosperity, the harvests of peace and progress, the fostering sunshine of health and happiness, and length of days in the land.

But there be things—oh, sons of what has deserved the name of Great Britain, forget it not! —“the good of” which and “the use of” which are beyond all calculation of worldly goods and earthly uses: things such as Love, and Honor,

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and the Soul of Man, which cannot be bought with a price, and which do not die with death. And they who would fain live happily EVER after, should not leave these things out of the lessons of their lives.

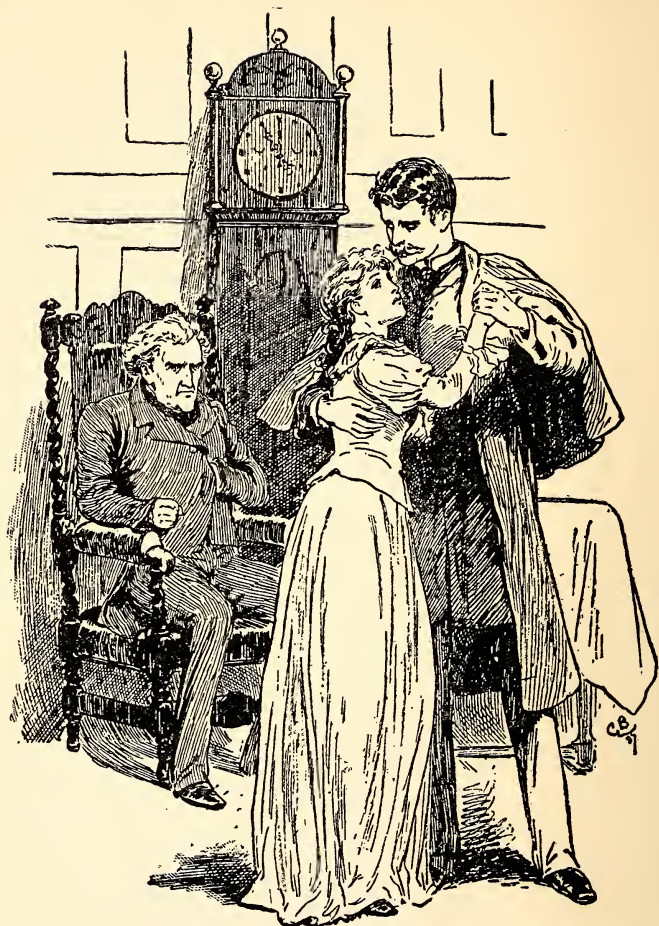




THE PEACE EGG



A CHRISTMAS TALE



“SHE CHOSE THE CAPTAIN.”

See p. 81.

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A CHRISTMAS TALE

I

EVERY one ought to be happy at Christmas. But there are many things which ought to be, and yet are not; and people are sometimes sad even in the Christmas holidays.

The Captain and his wife were sad, though it was Christmas Eve. Sad, though they were in the prime of life, blessed with good health, devoted to each other and to their children, with competent means, a comfortable house on a little freehold property of their own, and, one might say, everything that heart could desire. Sad, though they were good people, whose peace of mind had a firmer foundation than their earthly

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goods alone; contented people, too, with plenty of occupation for mind and body. Sad—and in the nursery this was held to be past all reason—though the children were performing that ancient and most entertaining Play or Christmas Mystery of Good St. George of England, known as The Peace Egg, for their benefit and behoof alone.

The play was none the worse that most of the actors were too young to learn parts, so that there was very little of the rather tedious dialogue, only plenty of dress and ribbons, and of fighting with the wooden swords. But though St. George looked bonny enough to warm any father's heart, as he marched up and down with an air learned by watching many a parade in barrack-square and drill-ground, and though the Valiant Slasher did not cry in spite of falling hard and the Doctor treading accidentally on his little finger in picking him up, still the Captain and his wife sighed nearly as often as they smiled, and the mother dropped tears as well as pennies into the cap which the King of Egypt brought round after the performance.

II

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE

MANY, many years back, the Captain's wife had been a child herself, and had laughed to see the village mummers act the Peace Egg, and had been quite happy on Christmas Eve. Happy, though she had no mother. Happy, though her father was a stern man, very fond of his only child, but with an obstinate will that not even she dared thwart. She had lived to thwart it, and he had never forgiven her. It was when she married the Captain. The old man had a prejudice against soldiers, which was quite reason enough, in his opinion, for his daughter to sacrifice the happiness of her future life by giving up the soldier she loved. At last he gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favor and money. She chose the Captain, and was disowned and disinherited.

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The Captain bore a high character, and was a good and clever officer, but that went for nothing against the old man's whim. He made a very good husband, too; but even this did not move his father-in-law, who had never held any intercourse with him or his wife since the day of their marriage, and who had never seen his own grandchildren. Though not so bitterly prejudiced as the old father, the Captain's wife's friends had their doubts about the marriage. The place was not a military station, and they were quiet country folk who knew very little about soldiers, whilst what they imagined was not altogether favorable to "red-coats," as they called them. Soldiers are well-looking, generally, it is true (and the Captain was more than well-looking—he was handsome); brave, of course, it is their business (and the Captain had V. C. after his name and several bits of ribbon on his patrol jacket). But then, thought the good people, they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, you "never know where you have them"; they are probably in debt, possibly married to several women in several foreign countries, and, though they are

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very courteous in society, who knows how they treat their wives when they drag them off from their natural friends and protectors to distant lands where no one can call them to account?

“Ah, poor thing!” said Mrs. John Bull, junior, as she took off her husband’s coat on his return from business, a week after the Captain’s wedding, “I wonder how she feels? There’s no doubt the old man behaved disgracefully; but it’s a great risk marrying a soldier. It stands to reason, military men are n’t domestic; and I wish—Lucy Jane, fetch your papa’s slippers, quick!—she’d had the sense to settle down comfortably amongst her friends with a man who would have taken care of her.”

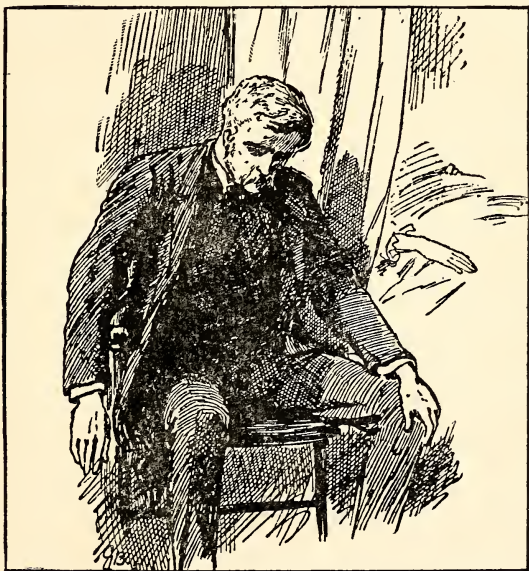
“Officers are a wild set, I expect,” said Mr. Bull, complacently, as he stretched his limbs in his own particular arm-chair, into which no member of his family ever intruded. “But the red-coats carry the day with plenty of girls who ought to know better. You women are always caught by a bit of finery. However, there’s no use our bothering our heads about it. As she has brewed she must bake.”

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The Captain's wife's baking was lighter and more palatable than her friends believed. The Captain (who took off his own coat when he came home, and never wore slippers but in his dressing-room) was domestic enough. A selfish companion must, doubtless, be a great trial amid the hardships of military life, but when a soldier is kind-hearted, he is often a much more helpful and thoughtful and handy husband than any equally well-meaning civilian. Amid the ups and downs of their wanderings, the discomforts of shipboard and of stations in the colonies, bad servants, and unwonted sicknesses, the Captain's tenderness never failed. If the life was rough the Captain was ready. He had been, by turns, in one strait or another, sick-nurse, doctor, carpenter, nursemaid, and cook to his family, and had, moreover, an idea that nobody filled these offices quite so well as himself. Withal, his very profession kept him neat, well-dressed, and active. In the roughest of their ever-changing quarters he was a smarter man, more like the lover of his wife's young days, than Mr. Bull amid his stationary comforts. Then if the Captain's wife

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was—as her friends said—“never settled,” she was also forever entertained by new scenes; and domestic mischances do not weigh very heavily on people whose possessions are few and their



“THE CAPTAIN’S TENDERNESS NEVER FAILED.”

intellectual interests many. It is true that there were ladies in the Captain’s regiment who passed by sea and land from one quarter of the globe

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to another, amid strange climates and customs, strange trees and flowers, beasts and birds, from the glittering snows of North America to the orchids of the Cape, from beautiful Pera to the lily-covered hills of Japan, and who in no place rose above the fret of domestic worries, and had little to tell on their return but of the universal misconduct of servants, from Irish "helps" in the colonies, to *compradors* and China-boys at Shanghai. But it was not so with the Captain's wife. Moreover, one becomes accustomed to one's fate, and she moved her whole establishment from the Curragh to Corfu with less anxiety than that felt by Mrs. Bull over a port-wine stain on the best table-cloth.

And yet, as years went and children came, the Captain and his wife grew tired of traveling. New scenes were small comfort when they heard of the death of old friends. One foot of murky English sky was dearer, after all, than miles of the unclouded heavens of the South. The gray hills and overgrown lanes of her old home haunted the Captain's wife by night and day, and homesickness (that weariest of all sicknesses) began

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to take the light out of her eyes before their time. It preyed upon the Captain, too. Now and then he would say, fretfully, "I should like an English resting-place, however small, before everybody is dead! But the children's prospects have to be considered." The continued estrangement from the old man was an abiding sorrow also, and they had hopes that, if only they could get to England, he might be persuaded to peace and charity this time.

At last they were sent home. But the hard old father still would not relent. He returned their letters unopened. This bitter disappointment made the Captain's wife so ill that she almost died, and in one month the Captain's hair became iron-gray. He reproached himself for having ever taken the daughter from her father, "to kill her at last," as he said. And (thinking of his own children) he even reproached himself for having robbed the old widower of his only child. After two years at home, his regiment was ordered to India. He failed to effect an exchange, and they prepared to move once more—from Chatham to Calcutta. Never before had

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the packing, to which she was so well accustomed, been so bitter a task to the Captain's wife.

It was at the darkest hour of this gloomy time that the Captain came in, waving above his head a letter which changed all their plans.

Now close by the old home of the Captain's wife there had lived a man much older than herself, who yet had loved her with a devotion as great as that of the young Captain. She never knew it, for when he saw that she had given her heart to his younger rival, he kept silence, and he never asked for what he knew he might have had—the old man's authority in his favor. So generous was the affection which he could never conquer, that he constantly tried to reconcile the father to his children whilst he lived, and, when he died, he bequeathed his house and small estate to the woman he had loved.

And thus it came about that the Captain's regiment went to India without him, and that the Captain's wife and her father lived on opposite sides of the same road.

III

MASTER ROBERT

THE eldest of the Captain's children was a boy. He was named Robert, after his grandfather, and seemed to have inherited a good deal of the old gentleman's character, mixed with gentler traits. He was a fair, fine boy, tall and stout for his age, with the Captain's regular features, and (he flattered himself) the Captain's firm step and martial bearing. He was apt—like his grandfather—to hold his own will to be other people's law, and (happily for the peace of the nursery) this opinion was devoutly shared by his brother Nicholas. Though the Captain had sold his commission, Robin continued to command an irregular force of volunteers in the nursery, and never was colonel more despotic. His brothers and sister were by turn infantry, cavalry, engineers, and artillery, ac-

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cording to his whim, and when his affections finally settled upon the Highlanders of "The Black Watch," no female power could compel him to keep his stockings above his knees, or his knickerbockers below them.

The Captain alone was a match for his strong-willed son.

"If you please, sir," said Sarah, one morning, flouncing in upon the Captain, just as he was about to start for the neighboring town,—“If you please, sir, I wish you'd speak to Master Robert. He 's past my powers.”

"I 've no doubt of it," thought the Captain, but he only said, "Well, what's the matter?"

"Night after night, do I put him to bed," said Sarah, "and night after night does he get up as soon as I'm out of the room, and says he's orderly officer for the evening, and goes about in his night-shirt and his feet as bare as boards."

The Captain fingered his heavy mustache to hide a smile, but he listened patiently to Sarah's complaints.

"It ain't so much him I should mind, sir," she continued, "but he goes round the beds and

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wakes up the other young gentlemen and Miss Dora, one after another, and when I speak to him, he gives me all the sauce he can lay his tongue to, and says he 's going round the guards. The other night I tried to put him back in his bed, but he got away and ran all over the house, me hunting him everywhere, and not a sign of him, till he jumps out on me from the garret-stairs and nearly knocks me down. 'I 've visited the outposts, Sarah,' says he; 'all's well.' And off he goes to bed as bold as brass."

"Have you spoken to your mistress?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, sir," said Sarah. "And missis spoke to him, and he promised not to go round the guards again."

"Has he broken his promise?" asked the Captain, with a look of anger, and also of surprise.

"When I opened the door last night, sir," continued Sarah, in her shrill treble, "what should I see in the dark but Master Robert a-walking up and down with the carpet-brush stuck in his arm. 'Who goes there?' says he. 'You owdacious boy!' says I, 'Didn't you promise your ma you'd

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leave off them tricks?' 'I'm not going round the guards,' says he; 'I promised not. But I'm for sentry-duty to-night.' And say what I would to him, all he had for me was, 'You must n't speak to a sentry on duty.' So I says, 'As sure as I live till morning, I'll go to your pa,' for he pays no more attention to his ma than to me, nor to any one else.'"

"Please to see that the chair-bed in my dressing-room is moved into your mistress's bedroom," said the Captain. "I will attend to Master Robert."

With this Sarah had to content herself, and she went back to the nursery. Robert was nowhere to be seen, and made no reply to her summons. On this the unwary nursemaid flounced into the bedroom to look for him, when Robert, who was hidden beneath a table, darted forth, and promptly locked her in.

"You 're under arrest," he shouted through the keyhole.

"Let me out!" shrieked Sarah.

"I 'll send a file of the guard to fetch you to the orderly-room, by and by," said Robert, "for

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‘preferring frivolous complaints.’ ” And he de-



“YOU MUST N'T SPEAK TO A SENTRY ON DUTY.”

parted to the farmyard to look at the ducks.

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That night, when Robert went up to bed, the Captain quietly locked him into his dressing-room, from which the bed had been removed.

“You ’re for sentry duty, to-night,” said the Captain. “The carpet-brush is in the corner. Good-evening.”

As his father anticipated, Robert was soon tired of the sentry game in these new circumstances, and long before the night had half worn away he wished himself safely undressed and in his own comfortable bed. At half-past twelve o’clock he felt as if he could bear it no longer, and knocked at the Captain’s door.

“Who goes there?” said the Captain.

“May n’t I go to bed, please?” whined poor Robert.

“Certainly not,” said the Captain. “You ’re on duty.”

And on duty poor Robert had to remain, for the Captain had a will as well as his son. So he rolled himself in his father’s railway rug, and slept on the floor.

The next night he was very glad to go quietly to bed, and remain there.

IV

IN THE NURSERY.

THE Captain's children sat at breakfast in a large, bright nursery. It was the room where the old bachelor had died, and now *her* children made it merry. This was just what he would have wished.

They all sat round the table, for it was breakfast time. There were five of them, and five bowls of boiled bread-and-milk smoked before them. Sarah (a foolish, gossiping girl, who acted as nurse till better could be found) was waiting on them, and by the table sat Darkie, the black retriever, his long, curly back swaying slightly from the difficulty of holding himself up, and his solemn hazel eyes fixed very intently on each and all of the breakfast bowls. He was as silent and sagacious as Sarah was talkative and empty-headed. The expression of his face was

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that of King Charles I, as painted by Vandyke. Though large, he was unassuming. Pax, the pug, on the contrary, who came up to the first joint of Darkie's leg, stood defiantly on his dignity (and his short stumps). He always placed himself in front of the bigger dog, and made a point of hustling him in doorways and of going first downstairs. He strutted like a beadle, and carried his tail more tightly curled than a bishop's crook. He looked, as one may imagine the frog in the fable would have looked, had he been able to swell himself rather nearer to the size of the ox. This was partly due to his very prominent eyes, and partly to an obesity favored by habits of lying inside the fender, and of eating meals proportioned more to his consequence than to his hunger. They were both favorites of two years' standing, and had very nearly been given away, when the good news came of an English home for the family, dogs and all.

Robert's tongue was seldom idle, even at meals. "Are you a Yorkshire woman, Sarah?" he asked, pausing, with his spoon full in his hand.

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“No, Master Robert,” said Sarah.

“But you understand Yorkshire, don’t you? I can’t, very often; but Mamma can, and can speak it, too. Papa says Mamma always talks Yorkshire to servants and poor people. She used to talk Yorkshire to Themistocles, Papa said, and he said it was no good; for though Themistocles knew a lot of languages, he didn’t know that. And Mamma laughed, and said she didn’t know she did. Themistocles was our man-servant in Corfu,” Robin added, in explanation. “He stole lots of things, Themistocles did; but Papa found him out.”

Robin now made a rapid attack on his bread-and-milk, after which he broke out again.

“Sarah, who is that tall old gentleman at church, in the seat near the pulpit? He wears a cloak like what the Blues wear, only all blue, and is tall enough for a Lifeguardsman. He stood when we were kneeling down, and said, ‘Almighty and most merciful Father,’ louder than anybody.”

Sarah knew who the old gentleman was, and knew also that the children did not know, and

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that their parents did not see fit to tell them as yet. But she had a passion for telling and hearing news, and would rather gossip with a child than not gossip at all. "Never you mind, Master Robin," she said, nodding sagaciously. "Little boys are n't to know everything."

"Ah, then, I know you don't know," replied Robert; "if you did, you 'd tell. Nicholas, give some of your bread to Darkie and Pax. I've done mine. For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful. Say your grace and put your chair away, and come along. I want to hold a court-martial." And seizing his own chair by the seat, Robin carried it swiftly to its corner. As he passed Sarah he observed, tauntingly, "You pretend to know, but you don't."

"I do," said Sarah.

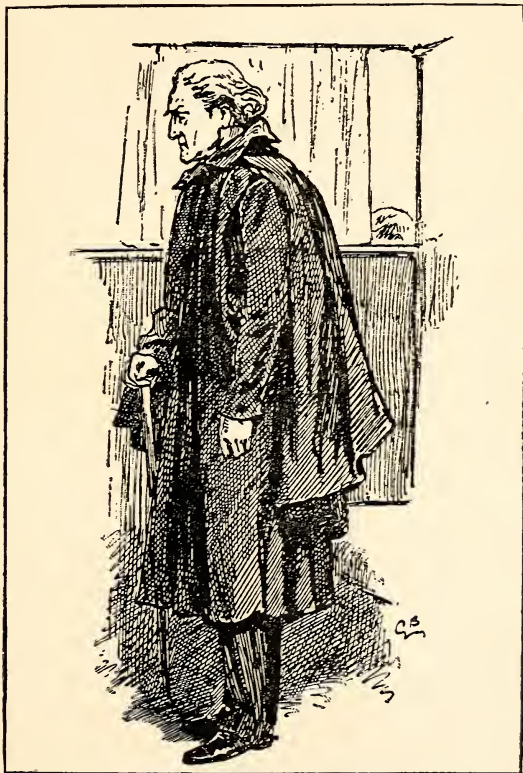
"You don't," said Robin.

"Your ma's forbid you to contradict, Master Robin," said Sarah; "and if you do I shall tell her. I know well enough who the old gentleman is, and perhaps I might tell you, only you 'd go straight off and tell again."

"No, no, I would n't!" shouted Robin. "I can

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keep a secret, indeed I can! Pinch my little finger, and try. Do, do tell me, Sarah, there's a



“HE STOOD WHEN WE WERE KNEELING.”

dear Sarah, and then I shall know you know.”

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And he danced round her, catching at her skirts.

To keep a secret was beyond Sarah's powers.

"Do let my dress be, Master Robin," she said, "you 're ripping out all the gathers, and listen while I whisper. As sure as you 're a living boy, that gentleman's your own grandpapa."

Robin lost his hold on Sarah's dress; his arms fell by his side, and he stood with his brows knit for some minutes, thinking. Then he said, emphatically, "What lies you do tell, Sarah!"

"Oh, Robin!" cried Nicholas, who had drawn near, his thick curls standing stark with curiosity, "Mamma said 'lies' was n't a proper word, and you promised not to say it again."

"I forgot," said Robin. "I did n't mean to break my promise. But she does tell—ahem!—you know what."

"You wicked boy!" cried the enraged Sarah; "how dare you say such a thing, and everybody in the place knows he 's your ma's own pa!"

"I'll go and ask her," said Robin, and he was at the door in a moment; but Sarah, alarmed by the thought of getting into a scrape herself, caught him by the arm.

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“Don’t you go, love; it’ll only make your ma angry. There; it was all my nonsense.”

“Then it ’s not true?” said Robin, indignantly. “What did you tell me so for?”

“It was all my jokes and nonsense,” said the unscrupulous Sarah. “But your ma would n’t like to know I ’ve said such a thing. And Master Robert would n’t be so mean as to tell tales, would he, love?”

“I ’m not mean,” said Robin, stoutly; “and I don’t tell tales; but you do, and you tell—you know what—besides. However, I won’t go this time; but I ’ll tell you what—if you tell tales of me to Papa any more, I ’ll tell him what you said about the old gentleman in the blue cloak.” With which parting threat Robin strode off to join his brothers and sister.

Sarah’s tale had put the court-martial out of his head, and he leaned against the tall fender, gazing at his little sister, who was tenderly nursing a well-worn doll. Robin sighed.

“What a long time that doll takes to wear out, Dora!” said he. “When will it be done?”

“Oh, not yet, not yet!” cried Dora, clasping

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the doll to her, and turning away. "She's quite good, yet."

"How miserly you are," said her brother; "and selfish, too; for you know I can't have a military funeral till you 'll let me bury that old thing."

Dora began to cry.

"There you go, crying!" said Robin, impatiently. "Look here: I won't take it till you get the new one on your birthday. You can't be so mean as not to let me have it then!"

But Dora's tears still fell. "I love this one so much," she sobbed. "I love her better than the new one."

"You want both; that 's it," said Robin, angrily. "Dora, you 're the meanest girl I ever knew!"

At which unjust and painful accusation Dora threw herself and the doll upon their faces, and wept bitterly. The eyes of the soft-hearted Nicholas began to fill with tears, and he squatted down before her, looking most dismal. He had a fellow-feeling for her attachment to an old toy, and yet Robin's will was law to him.

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“Could n’t we make a coffin, and pretend the body was inside?” he suggested.

“No, we could n’t,” said Robin. “I would n’t play the Dead March after an empty candle-box. It ’s a great shame—and I promised she should be chaplain in one of my night-gowns, too.”

“Perhaps you ’ll get just as fond of the new one,” said Nicholas, turning to Dora.

But Dora only cried, “No, no! He shall have the new one to bury, and I ’ll keep my poor, dear, darling Betsy.” And she clasped Betsy tighter than before.

“That ’s the meanest thing you ’ve said yet,” retorted Robin; “for you know Mamma would n’t let me bury the new one.” And, with an air of great disgust, he quitted the nursery.

V

“A-MUMMING WE WILL Go.”

NICHOLAS had sore work to console his little sister, and Betsy's prospects were in a very unfavorable state, when a diversion was caused in her favor by a new whim which put the military funeral out of Robin's head.

After he left the nursery he strolled out of doors, and, peeping through the gate at the end of the drive, he saw a party of boys going through what looked like a military exercise with sticks and a good deal of stamping; but, instead of mere words of command, they all spoke by turns, as in a play. In spite of their strong Yorkshire accent, Robin overheard a good deal, and it sounded very fine. Not being at all shy, he joined them, and asked so many questions that he soon got to know all about it. They were

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practicing a Christmas mumming-play, called "The Peace Egg." Why it was called thus, they could not tell him, as there was nothing whatever about eggs in it, and so far from being a play of peace, it was made up of a series of battles between certain valiant knights and princes, of whom St. George of England was the chief and conqueror. The rehearsal being over, Robin went with the boys to the sexton's house (he was father to the "King of Egypt"), where they showed him the dresses they were to wear. These were made of gay-colored materials, and covered with ribbons, except that of the "Black Prince of Paradine," which was black, as became his title. The boys also showed him the book from which they learned their parts, and which was to be bought for one penny at the post-office shop.

"Then are you the mummers who come round at Christmas, and act in people's kitchens, and people give them money, that Mamma used to tell us about?" said Robin.

St. George of England looked at his companions as if for counsel as to how far they

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might commit themselves, and then replied, with Yorkshire caution, "Well, I suppose we are."

"And do you go out in the snow from one house to another at night; and oh, don't you enjoy it?" cried Robin.

"We like it well enough," St. George admitted.

Robin bought a copy of "The Peace Egg." He was resolved to have a nursery performance, and to act the part of St. George himself. The others were willing for what he wished, but there were difficulties. In the first place, there are eight characters in the play, and there were only five children. They decided among themselves to leave out the "Fool," and Mamma said that another character was not to be acted by any of them, or, indeed, mentioned; "the little one who comes in at the end," Robin explained. Mamma had her reasons, and these were always good. She had not been altogether pleased that Robin had bought the play. It was a very old thing, she said, and very queer; not adapted for a child's play. If Mamma thought the parts not quite fit for the children to learn, they found them much too long; so in the end she picked out

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some bits for each, which they learned easily, and which, with a good deal of fighting, made quite as good a story of it as if they had done the whole. What may have been wanting otherwise was made up for by the dresses, which were charming.

Robin was St. George; Nicholas, the Valiant Slasher; Dora, the Doctor; and the other two, Hector and the King of Egypt. "And now we've no Black Prince!" cried Robin, in dismay.

"Let Darkie be the Black Prince," said Nicholas. "When you wave your stick he'll jump for it, and then you can pretend to fight with him."

"It's not a stick, it's a sword," said Robin. "However, Darkie may be the Black Prince."

"And what's Pax to be?" asked Dora; "for you know he will come if Darkie does, and he'll run in before everybody else, too."

"Then he must be the Fool," said Robin, "and it will do very well, for the Fool comes in before the rest, and Pax can have his red coat on, and the collar with the little bells."

VI

CHRISTMAS EVE.

ROBIN thought that Christmas would never come. To the Captain and his wife it seemed to come too fast. They had hoped it might bring reconciliation with the old man, but it seemed they had hoped in vain.

There were times now when the Captain almost regretted the old bachelor's bequest. The familiar scenes of her old home sharpened his wife's grief. To see her father every Sunday in church, with marks of age and infirmity upon him, but with not a look of tenderness for his only child, this tried her sorely.

"She felt it less abroad," thought the Captain. "An English home in which she frets herself to death is, after all, no great boon."

Christmas Eve came.

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"I'm sure it's quite Christmas enough now," said Robin. "We'll have 'The Peace Egg' to-night."

So as the Captain and his wife sat sadly over their fire, the door opened, and Pax ran in shaking his bells, and followed by the nursery mums. The performance was most successful. It was by no means pathetic, and yet, as has been said, the Captain's wife shed tears.

"What is the matter, Mamma?" said St. George, abruptly dropping his sword and running up to her.

"Don't tease Mamma with questions," said the Captain; "she is not very well, and rather sad. We must all be very kind and good to poor, dear Mamma;" and the Captain raised his wife's hand to his lips as he spoke. Robin seized the other hand and kissed it tenderly. He was very fond of his mother. At this moment Pax took a little run, and jumped onto Mamma's lap, where, sitting facing the company, he opened his black mouth and yawned, with a ludicrous inappropriateness worthy of any clown. It made everybody laugh.

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"And now we 'll go and act in the kitchen," said Nicholas.

"Supper at nine o'clock, remember," shouted the Captain. "We are going to have real frumenty and Yule cakes, such as Mamma used to tell us of when we were abroad."

"Hurrray!" shouted the mummers, and they ran off, Pax leaping from his seat just in time to hustle the Black Prince in the doorway. When the dining-room door was shut, St. George raised his hand, and said "Hush!"

The mummers pricked their ears, but there was only a distant harsh and scraping sound, as of stones rubbed together.

"They 're cleaning the passages," St. George went on, "and Sarah told me they meant to finish the mistletoe, and have everything cleaned up by supper-time. They don't want us, I know. Look here, we 'll go real mumming instead. That will be fun!"

The Valiant Slasher grinned with delight.

"But will Mamma let us?" he inquired.

"Oh, it will be all right if we 're back by supper-time," said St. George, hastily. Only,

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of course, we must take care not to catch cold. Come and help me to get some wraps."

The old oak chest in which spare shawls, rugs, and coats were kept was soon ransacked, and the mummers' gay dresses hidden by motley wrappers. But no sooner did Darkie and Pax behold the coats, etc., than they at once began to leap and bark, as it was their custom to do when they saw any one dressing to go out. Robin was sorely afraid that this would betray them; but though the Captain and his wife heard the barking they did not guess the cause.

So the front door being very gently opened and closed, the nursery mummers stole away.

VII

THE NURSERY MUMMERS AND THE OLD MAN.

IT was a very fine night. The snow was well-trodden on the drive, so that it did not wet their feet, but on the trees and shrubs it hung soft and white.

"It's much jollier being out at night than in the daytime," said Robin.

"Much," responded Nicholas, with intense feeling.

"We'll go a-wassailing next week," said Robin. "I know all about it, and perhaps we shall get a good lot of money, and then we'll buy tin swords with scabbards for next year. I don't like these sticks. Oh, dear, I wish it was n't so long between one Christmas and another."

"Where shall we go first?" asked Nicholas, as they turned into the high road. But before

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Robin could reply, Dora clung to Nicholas, crying, "Oh, look at those men!"

The boys looked up the road, down which three men were coming in a very unsteady fashion, and shouting as they rolled from side to side.

"They 're drunk," said Nicholas; "and they 're shouting at us."

"Oh, run, run!" cried Dora; and down the road they ran, the men shouting and following them. They had not run far, when Hector caught his foot in the Captain's greatcoat, which he was wearing, and came down headlong in the road. They were close by a gate, and when Nicholas had set Hector upon his legs, St. George hastily opened it.

"This is the first house," he said. "We 'll act here;" and all, even the Valiant Slasher, pressed in as quickly as possible. Once safe within the grounds, they shouldered their sticks, and resumed their composure.

"You 're going to the front door," said Nicholas. "Mummers ought to go to the back."

"We don't know where it is," said Robin, and

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he rang the front-door bell. There was a pause. Then lights shone, steps were heard, and at last the sound of much unbarring, unbolting, and unlocking. It might have been a prison. Then the door was opened by an elderly, timid-looking woman, who held a tallow candle above her head.

“Who ’s there?” she said, “at this time of night?”

“We ’re Christmas mummers,” said Robin, stoutly; “we didn’t know the way to the back door, but—”

“And don’t you know better than to come here?” said the woman. “Be off with you, as fast as you can.”

“You ’re only the servant,” said Robin. “Go and ask your master or mistress if they wouldn’t like to see us act. We do it very well.”

“You impudent boy, be off with you!” repeated the woman. “Master ’d no more let you nor any other such rubbish set foot in this house—”

“Woman!” shouted a voice close behind her, which made her start as if she had been shot,

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“who authorizes you to say what your master will or will not do, before you ’ve asked him? The boy is right. You are the servant, and it is not your business to choose for me whom I shall or shall not see.”

“I meant no harm, sir, I ’m sure,” said the housekeeper; “but I thought you ’d never—”

“My good woman,” said her master, “if I had wanted somebody to think for me, you ’re the last person I should have employed. I hire you to obey orders, not to think.”

“I ’m sure, sir,” said the housekeeper, whose only form of argument was reiteration, “I never thought you would have seen them—”

“Then you were wrong,” shouted her master. “I will see them. Bring them in.”

He was a tall, gaunt old man, and Robin stared at him for some minutes, wondering where he could have seen somebody very like him. At last he remembered. It was the old gentleman of the blue cloak.

The children threw off their wraps, the housekeeper helping them, and chattering ceaselessly, from sheer nervousness.

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“Well, to be sure,” said she, “their dresses are pretty, too. And they seem quite a better sort of children; they talk quite genteel. I might ha’ knowed they were n’t like common mummers, but I was so flusterated hearing the bell go so late, and—”

“Are they ready?” said the old man, who had stood like a ghost in the dim light of the flaring tallow candle, grimly watching the proceedings.

“Yes, sir. Shall I take them to the kitchen, sir?”

“For you and the other idle hussies to gape and grin at? No. Bring them to the library,” he snapped, and then stalked off, leading the way.

The housekeeper accordingly led them to the library, and then withdrew, nearly falling on her face as she left the room by stumbling over Darkie, who slipped in last like a black shadow.

The old man was seated in a carved oak chair by the fire.

“I never said the dogs were to come in,” he said.

“But we can’t do without them, please,” said

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Robin, boldly. "You see there are eight people in 'The Peace Egg,' and there are only five of us; and so Darkie has to be the Black Prince, and Pax has to be the Fool, and so we have to have them."

"Five and two make seven," said the old man, with a grim smile; "what do you do for the eighth?"

"Oh, that's the little one at the end," said Robin, confidentially. "Mamma said we weren't to mention him, but I think that's because we're children.—You're grown up, you know, so I'll show you the book, and you can see for yourself," he went on, drawing "The Peace Egg" from his pocket: "there, that's the picture of him, on the last page; black, with horns and a tail."

The old man's stern face relaxed into a broad smile as he examined the grotesque woodcut; but when he turned to the first page the smile vanished in a deep frown, and his eyes shone like hot coals with anger. He had seen Robin's name.

"Who sent you here?" he asked, in a hoarse

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voice. "Speak, and speak the truth! Did your mother send you here?"

Robin thought the old man was angry with them for playing truant. He said, slowly, "N-no. She didn't exactly send us; but I don't think she'll mind our having come if we get back in time for supper. Mamma never forbid our going mumming, you know."

"I don't suppose she ever thought of it," Nicholas said, candidly, wagging his curly head from side to side.

"She knows we're mummers," said Robin, "for she helped us. When we were abroad, you know, she used to tell us about the mummers acting at Christmas, when she was a little girl; and so we thought we'd be mummers, and so we acted to Papa and Mamma, and so we thought we'd act to the maids, but they were cleaning the passages, and so we thought we'd really go mumming; and we've got several other houses to go to before supper-time; we'd better begin, I think," said Robin; and without more ado he began to march round and round, raising his sword and shouting,—

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“I am St. George, who from Old England sprung,
My famous name throughout the world hath rung”

And the performance went off quite as creditably as before.

As the children acted, the old man's anger wore off. He watched them with an interest he could not repress. When Nicholas took some hard thwacks from St. George without flinching, the old man clapped his hands; and, after the encounter between St. George and the Black Prince, he said he would not have had the dogs excluded on any consideration. It was just at the end, when they were all marching round and round, holding on by each other's swords “over the shoulder,” and singing, “A-mumming we will go,” etc., that Nicholas suddenly brought the circle to a standstill by stopping dead short, and staring up at the wall before him.

“What *are* you stopping for?” said St. George, turning indignantly round.

“Look there!” cried Nicholas, pointing to a little painting which hung above the old man's head.

Robin looked, and said, abruptly, “It's Dora.”

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"Which is Dora?" asked the old man, in a strange, sharp tone.

"Here she is," said Robin and Nicholas, in one breath, as they dragged her forward.

"She 's the Doctor," said Robin; "and you can't see her face for her things. Dor, take off your cap and pull back that hood. There! Oh, it is like her!"

It was a portrait of her mother as a child; but of this the nursery mummers knew nothing. The old man looked as the peaked cap and hood fell away from Dora's face and fair curls, and then he uttered a sharp cry, and buried his head upon his hands. The boys stood stupefied, but Dora ran up to him, and putting her little hands on his arms, said, in childish, pitying tones, "Oh, I 'm so sorry! Have you got a headache? May Robin put the shovel in the fire for you? Mamma has hot shovels for her headaches." And, though the old man did not speak or move, she went on coaxing him, and stroking his head, on which the hair was white. At this moment Pax took one of his unexpected runs, and jumped onto the old man's knee, in his own particular

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fashion, and then yawned at the company. The old man was startled, and lifted his face suddenly. It was wet with tears.



“OH, I ’M SO SORRY.”

“Why, you ’re crying!” exclaimed the children with one breath.

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“It’s very odd,” said Robin, fretfully. “I can’t think what’s the matter to-night. Mamma was crying, too, when we were acting, and Papa said we were n’t to tease her with questions, and he kissed her hand, and I kissed her hand, too. And Papa said we must all be very good and kind to poor, dear Mamma, and so I mean to be, she’s so good. And I think we’d better go home, or perhaps she’ll be frightened,” Robin added.

“She’s so good, is she?” asked the old man. He had put Pax off his knee, and taken Dora onto it.

“Oh, is n’t she!” said Nicholas, swaying his curly head from side to side as usual.

“She’s always good,” said Robin, emphatically; “and so’s Papa. But I’m always doing something I ought n’t to,” he added, slowly. “But then, you know, I don’t pretend to obey Sarah. I don’t care a fig for Sarah; and I won’t obey any woman but Mamma.”

“Who’s Sarah?” asked the grandfather.

“She’s our nurse,” said Robin, “and she tells—I must n’t say what she tells—but it’s not the

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"IT WAS HER FATHER, WITH HER CHILD IN HIS ARMS."

truth. She told one about *you* the other day," he added.

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“About me?” said the old man.

“She said you were our grandpapa. So then I knew she was telling *you know what*.”

“How did you know it was n’t true?” the old man asked.

“Why, of course,” said Robin, “if you were our Mamma’s father, you’d know her, and be very fond of her, and come and see her. And then you’d be our grandfather, too, and you’d have us to see you, and perhaps give us Christmas-boxes. I wish you were,” Robin added with a sigh. “It would be very nice.”

“Would you like it?” asked the old man, of Dora.

And Dora who was half asleep and very comfortable, put her little arms about his neck as she was wont to put them round the Captain’s, and said, “Very much.”

He put her down at last, very tenderly, almost unwillingly, and left the children alone. By-and-by he returned, dressed in the blue cloak, and took Dora up again.

“I will see you home,” he said.

The children had not been missed. The clock

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had only just struck nine when there came a knock on the door of the dining-room, where the Captain and his wife still sat by the Yule log. She said, "Come in," wearily, thinking it was the frumenty and the Christmas cakes.

But it was her father, with her child in his arms!

VIII

PEACE AND GOODWILL.

LUCY JANE BULL—and her sisters were quite old enough to understand a good deal of grown-up conversation when they overheard it. Thus, when a friend of Mrs. Bull's observed during an afternoon call that she believed that "officers' wives were very dressy," the young ladies were at once resolved to keep a sharp lookout for the Captain's wife's bonnet in church on Christmas Day.

The Bulls had just taken their seats when the Captain's wife came in. They really would have hid their faces, and looked at the bonnet afterwards, but for the startling sight that met the gaze of the congregation. The old grandfather walked into church abreast of the Captain.

"They 've met in the porch," whispered Mr. Bull, under the shelter of his hat.

"They can't quarrel publicly in a place of worship," said Mrs. Bull, turning pale.

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"She 's gone into his seat," cried Lucy Jane, in a shrill whisper.

"And the children after her," added the other sister, incautiously aloud.



"WALKED INTO CHURCH ABREAST OF THE CAPTAIN."

There was now no doubt about the matter. The old man in his blue cloak stood for a few moments politely disputing the question of prece-

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dence with his handsome son-in-law. Then the Captain bowed and passed in, and the old man followed him.

By the time that the service was ended everybody knew of the happy peacemaking, and was glad. One old friend after another came up with blessings and good wishes. This was a proper Christmas, indeed, they said. There was general rejoicing.

But only the grandfather and his children knew that it was hatched from "The Peace Egg."



